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ABSTRACT

The Norfolk (England) Local Education Authority (LEA) undertook successful collaborations with employers, voluntary organizations, and the health service. Many employers were willing to invest in basic skills training for their employees in work time and in the workplace. They were more receptive if a need had been identified or employees had problems with new procedures or systems. Short courses were offered because employer cost was relatively small and goals were attainable, achievements measurable, and progress quantifiable. The Norfolk LEA also involved employers in the retail industry in provision of basic skills training for women. Factors that led to success were integration of basic skills in a preemployment training program and real workplace situation, materials, and training. Factors that caused difficulties were cramped store training rooms and attempts to balance basic skills and other training. Providing basic skills within the voluntary organizations' training program proved an effective way of reaching a new audience and delivering basic skills in a relevant and accessible way. Nine young women in the Great Yarmouth Young Women's Project enrolled in an education program that offered basic skills. A joint project with the Norfolk Health Authority improved access to health education and basic skills training through increased awareness of health staff, health staff training, advice on material simplification, and a program of short courses and sample sessions. (YLB)

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# REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

**Andrea Mearing, Basic Skills Coordinator for Norfolk LEA, sets out the reasons why making alliances with new partners is important. She gives examples of successful joint work with employers, voluntary organisations and the health service.**

## Introduction

Any cost benefit analysis will show that working with other agencies is a must for the future. The problems are few and the rewards substantial. LEAs, colleges and other providers will reach new audiences, they will be able to devise new approaches to basic skills and they will attract support and funding.

From our experience in Norfolk there are many agencies whose priorities and targets are broadly similar to those of adult education. They have welcomed the opportunity to work with Basic Skills staff to improve the access and quality of both services and make them available to a wider audience.

We have been determined that joint work should extend beyond agencies referring adults to basic skills provision. We have taken basic skills into their organisations and involved their staff in developing programmes of training. It is still early days but the following projects provide examples of what has worked. The first two examples describe work with employers and Voluntary Organisations which began in 1992. The last example 'Step to Health' is at an earlier stage but promises to be equally exciting.

## Working with Employers

Many employers have been willing to invest in basic skills training for their employees in work time and in the workplace.

Our experience of selling basic skills to employers showed that they were more receptive to basic skills training if:

- a need had been identified within the workplace or amongst applicants
- there had been requests for training from employees or unions
- it would help them gain Investors in People, TQM or BS5750
- they were concerned about the introduction of NVQs
- there had been problems with employees coping with new legislation, e.g. Health and Safety, Food Hygiene
- or with new procedures in the workplace
- or with new systems of working, e.g. team working
- it would be shown to increase productivity, efficiency or flexibility.

### *Delivering Basic Skills Training*

We offered short courses which we felt were characterised by:

- fixed start and finish dates
- all participants begin on day one and attend the whole course
- an agreed curriculum
- agreed outcomes
- a programme customised to the needs of employer/employees
- a teacher/student ratio of 1:10
- relevant elements of the ALBSU Quality Standards.

### *Why short courses?*

- the product is marketable
- the commitment from the employer is manageable
- they are a traditional model of training
- they do not make too many demands on the training room
- cover can be arranged without too much disruption
- the cost to the employer is relatively small
- the course length suits the individuals
- goals are attainable, achievements are measurable and progress quantifiable
- elements of accreditation can be achieved.

In Norfolk we have also involved employers in the retail industry in the provision of basic skills training for applicants. To date, fourteen employers have made a substantial contribution to the TEC/LEA's Basic Skills at Work project, Return to Retail, which has provided short courses in basic skills for women wishing to return to work in retail.



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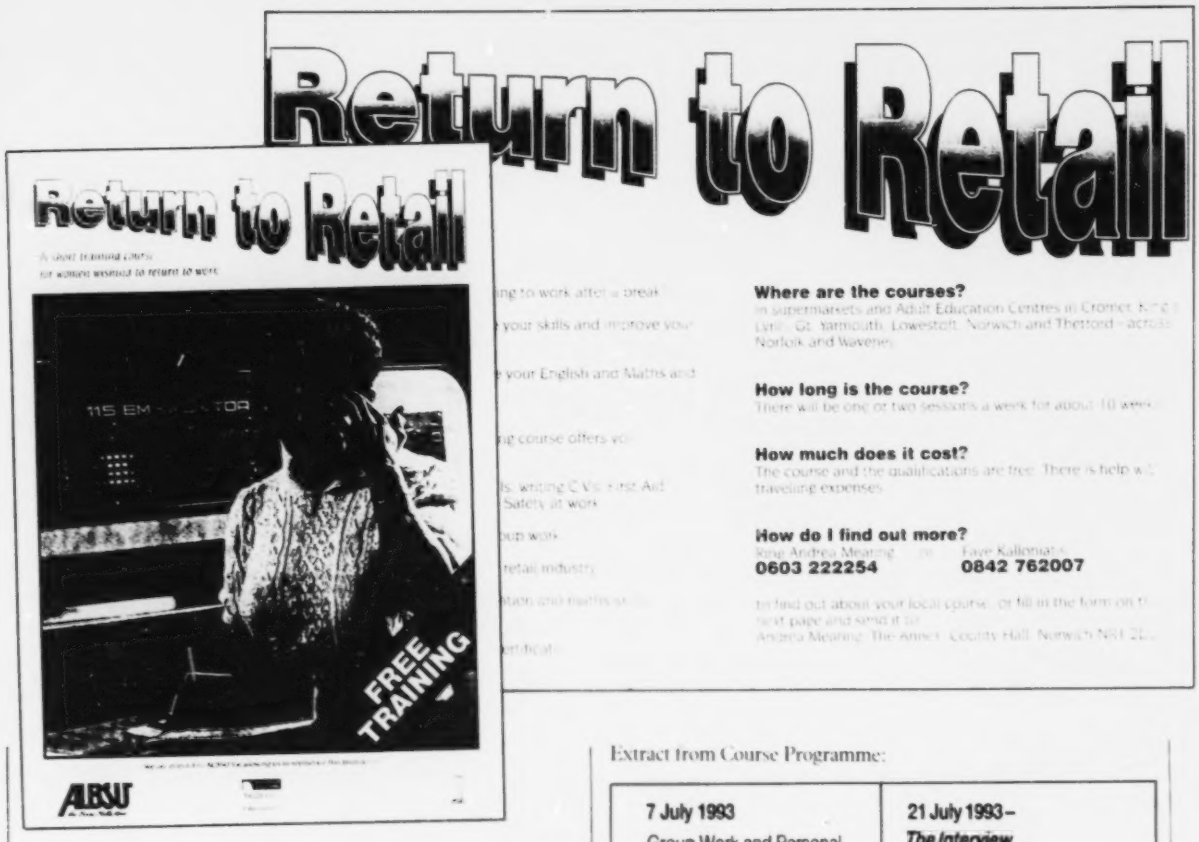


The stores have participated actively in this programme; they have provided training rooms in the supermarkets, access to store training materials, interviews for each participant, work experience and an introduction to till training, customer care and workplace procedures.

*Programme:* The women worked towards selected units of Wordpower and Numberpower Stages 1 and 2 using the following resources:

- First Aid and Food Hygiene courses
- Till Training
- Technology in the store
- Interviews and talks from store personnel
- Form filling, extracting information, using store paperwork
- Letter writing
- Articles from the press on Sunday Trading
- Supermarket layouts.

*Outcomes*

- 90% attendance rate
- All women successfully completed First Aid, Food Hygiene, NVQ in practical retailing, Wordpower (two at stage 1, six at stage 2) and also completed a portfolio
- All stated they felt more confident, knew more about working in retail and were better at writing CVs and preparing for interviews
- Increased awareness of opportunities in training and further education
- More than half have progressed to classes to complete Numberpower
- The Store Personnel Manager, who was very supportive, appreciated the quality of basic skills training and has offered to host a further course.

Extract from Course Programme:

| | |
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| **7 July 1993**<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Break<br>First Aid – Part One<br>Lunch<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Break<br>'Staff Dress' – Video | **21 July 1993 –**<br>***The Interview***<br>Introduction to the day by the Personnel Manager<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Lunch<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Review of the day |
| **14 July 1993**<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Break<br>First Aid – Part Two<br>Lunch<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Break<br>'Technology In The Store' – Admin Manager | **28 July 1993**<br>Group Work and Personal Study<br>Break<br>'Where Next' – Outside speaker<br>Lunch<br>Course Evaluation |

The benefits of working with employers have been significant.

- Over a hundred women returners have been attracted to a programme that they see as relevant, practical and likely to lead to employment.
- Basic skills have been integrated into a broad programme of pre-employment training. The women have valued the opportunities to brush up skills, to gain qualifications, to

improve their confidence and to set themselves more challenging goals for the future. 90% have progressed to further education, training or employment.

- It has been exciting that already four of the stores involved have offered jobs to Return to Retail trainees. All have agreed to support further training courses. Other stores hearing of the programme have been keen to participate and employers from the Tourism and Leisure Sector have agreed to support a similar model of training for adults wishing to work in their sector.

In evaluating the work we have identified –

### *Factors which lead to success*

- clear focus of course
- timescale – instant start
- integration of basic skills in a programme of pre-employment training
- real workplace situations, materials, training and interviews
- free, help with transport
- successful marketing has attracted women returners
- range of certificates on offer.

### *Factors which have caused difficulties*

- store training rooms have been cramped
- timing the courses to finish when stores are recruiting staff
- planning the course to get a balance of basic skills and other training
- the increase of part-time casual work in the retail industry
- ensuring the course was generic – not pre-employment training for just one particular chain.

## Working with Voluntary Organisations

Many voluntary organisations working with families offer their clients training. Providing basic skills within the organisations' training programme has proved an effective way of reaching a new audience and delivering basic skills in a relevant and accessible way.

This approach has worked successfully in Norfolk with the Great Yarmouth Young Women's Project. Some 25 young women aged between 14 and 25 attend the project where they receive advice and support in housing, health and ante natal care. Nine of these young women enrolled on an education programme which offered them basic Maths and English, a range of taster sessions and short courses and opportunities to develop their portfolios and consider their future options.

By the end of the year each of the young women had completed a portfolio, gained Wordpower and Numberpower Certificates, attended short courses in First Aid and Wordprocessing, Health Education, Animal Rights and Helping Your Child to Read and Write. They have modified their goals and set more challenging goals for the future.

In evaluating the course they wrote,

> ***'In gaining the confidence to be able to learn again, after leaving school so many years ago. Being given another chance.'***
>
> ***'It has given me an opportunity to go back to education in a way that I could cope with.'***

*An extract from the work completed on developing oral skills:*

- supporting an argument in discussion
- listening to others
- inteviewing techniques
- producing broadsheet of local news to deadline
- producing 5 minute radio broadcast to deadline
- producing newsletter to deadline
- exploring and creating material for own children to promote pre-school literacy.

The Girls Friendly Society fund the premises and the project worker, ALBSU and the County's Youth and ABE Service have supported the programme and funded the tuition, certification fees, creche and transport.

By working with a voluntary organisation the service has been able to:

- attract a new target group
- provide an accessible customised programme of education and training
- devise a model of working/training which has been transferred to other voluntary organisations
- design a programme which has been challenging and attractive to young people. This has been adapted for use with other groups of young people
- acknowledge the young women's roles as mothers
- build on their experience of education.

## Working with Health Staff

Research indicates that adults with basic skills difficulties are more likely to report health problems. Health Staff were aware that education played an important role not only in encouraging people to adopt a more healthy life style but also in enabling them to take advantage of health care.

In 1990 the Norwich Health Authority launched the **Healthy Norfolk 200** campaign with three aims:

- To improve the health and well being of Norfolk people
- To reduce inequalities in health
- To encourage cooperation between all organisations in Norfolk with a responsibility for health.

We agreed to develop a joint programme which would improve access to health education and basic skills training. Initially this programme has focused on two of the three key priority neighbourhoods in the City of Norfolk.

The programme has five major elements.

### *Raising Awareness of Health Staff*

Some staff are not aware that their patients have not attended hospital appointments or joined ante-natal classes or followed courses of treatment, because they have not understood the letters sent by hospitals or instructions given by doctors. The basic skills project tutor has talked to individual health staff and arranged a number of information sessions for health staff. These sessions give information about the scale of basic skills needs, the impact poor basic skills will have on the take up of health care and the understanding of health promotion campaigns and look at ways of improving communications with patients.

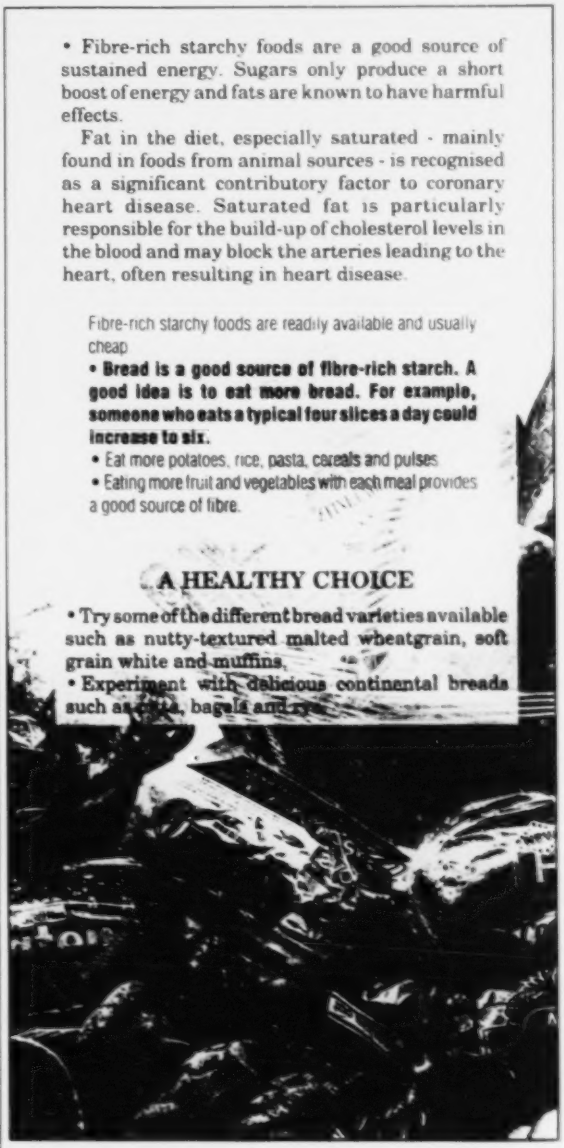
### *Training of Health Staff*

More extensive training will be offered to health staff who wish to look in greater depth at methods of teaching basic skills to adults. A modified version of the 9282 will be used for this training.

### *Advice on the Simplification of Material*

Much of the Health Promotion literature has relied on the publication of leaflets and posters. Although many of these have been produced in an eye-catching colourful format using cartoons, tables and diagrams, the content is often inaccessible to Foundation or Stage 1 Level readers as the example on page 4 shows. Not only

are there a number of health terms which are obscure but the general level of vocabulary is difficult.


• Fibre-rich starchy foods are a good source of sustained energy. Sugars only produce a short boost of energy and fats are known to have harmful effects.
Fat in the diet, especially saturated - mainly found in foods from animal sources - is recognised as a significant contributory factor to coronary heart disease. Saturated fat is particularly responsible for the build-up of cholesterol levels in the blood and may block the arteries leading to the heart, often resulting in heart disease.
Fibre-rich starchy foods are readily available and usually cheap
• Bread is a good source of fibre-rich starch. A good idea is to eat more bread. For example, someone who eats a typical four slices a day could increase to six.
• Eat more potatoes, rice, pasta, cereals and pulses
• Eating more fruit and vegetables with each meal provides a good source of fibre.
A HEALTHY CHOICE
• Try some of the different bread varieties available such as nutty-textured malted wheatgrain, soft grain white and muffins.
• Experiment with delicious continental breads such as pitta, bagels and rye

To date the following have been involved in the simplification of material.

- *Healthy Norfolk 2000*: booklet for the public on the Healthy Norfolk 2000
- *Family Health Services*: leaflet 'Bringing Health to Life'
- *Hospital Staff*: letters to patients re – follow up appointments
- *Health Promotion Unit*: audit of existing leaflets.

### *A programme of short courses and taster sessions*

The programme of work agreed by the Healthy Norfolk 2000 project for 1993-94 is focusing on the following areas:

- Accidents in the home
- Young Road Users
- Norfolk Workplace Project
- Disability Awareness
- Cancer
- Healthy Schools Award
- Heart Health Year
- Tobacco Advertising.

Basic Skills tuition has been planned to support these programme areas. Tuition is flexible, including taster sessions and short courses. All are characterised by:

- attainable goals
- short term commitment
- certification
- basic skills integrated into a health course
- individual and/or group tuition.

Courses on offer include:

- *Healthy Living – Getting the main idea*: A self access work book
- *Safety in the Home*: A short course
- *Step to Health*: Keep Fit, Aerobics, Step, Yoga – A programme of keep-fit tasters and discussion
- *Healthy Eating*: A hands-on short course.

### *Development of materials on health themes linked to Wordpower*

Work is underway on a Health and Safety at Work Workpack, which is being jointly written by Environmental Health and basic skills staff. Similar materials will be devised by staff using existing health promotion materials. These will be simplified and made more accessible for adults with basic skills needs. The primary aim is to convey health information but they will also act as a resource for basic skills teaching and will link into the framework of Wordpower.

The alliance between basic skills and health staff has been opportune and productive. Health staff have encouraged adults to access health education and basic skills programmes. The Basic Skills tutor has worked closely with health staff to devise courses which are accessible, practical, immediately relevant and fit into the broader programme of health education in the community.

## Conclusion

These examples demonstrate the value of working with other agencies. It has taken time to understand other agencies' priorities, their language, their structure, their timescale and their funding arrangements. It has required energy and persistence to ensure 'working with' is more than referral and the simplification of materials. It has also involved decisions about re-allocation of resources, but the benefits are significant:

- New audiences have been reached
- New approaches to delivering basic skills have been developed
- Basic skills have been integrated into agencies' existing programmes of training or education
- We have attracted commitment and funding
- We have achieved our own targets and helped other agencies achieve theirs
- We have, we hope, made a long term effect on the view these agencies have of basic skills.

We are committed to complementing our existing core provision by developing active alliances with agencies, voluntary organisations and employers which involve them directly in the planning and delivery of basic skills programmes.

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